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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DAKAR 000393

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [ASEC](#) [PINR](#) [KDEM](#) [SG](#)  
SUBJECT: SUNDAY'S PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION: THERE'LL BE A  
SECOND ROUND, OR SOMETHING'S FISHY

REF: DAKAR 0380

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROY L. WHITAKER FOR REASONS 1.4 (B)  
AND (D).

#### SUMMARY

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11. (C) President Abdoulaye Wade's people claim he will win the first round presidential election on February 25. Others, in sharp contrast, claim his private polls are so bad he could drop out of the race before Sunday. Amidst this fog of spin and speculation, and absent reliable polls, we find it unlikely Wade will win the first round. His personal political base has never been more than a third of the electorate and his ruling party is fractured and fraying. There is, in addition, deep disappointment with his performance and a widespread perception that social and economic problems are getting worse. It is true, though, that his Interior Ministry has reshaped and some critics would say manipulated the electoral process, invariably in ways that could help him. The opposition is already charging it will be a "coup d'etat" if Wade is declared winner in the first round. END SUMMARY.

#### THE WAR OF SPIN

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12. (C) Wade's Senegalese Democratic Party (PDS) is trying to construct a case that Wade is invulnerable and his re-election inevitable, with consistent prediction that he will win with "just over 50 percent." In support of that, the PDS is spending huge sums of money, and Wade's campaign slogan, "Together, let's continue to build Senegal," reflects the heavy publicity that state media are giving public works projects in Dakar; PDS organizers are hinting to the public that any successor might leave those projects unfinished.

13. (C) In contrast, there have been rumors -- totally unsubstantiated and possibly circulated by the opposition -- that Wade's latest polls are so devastating he might even withdraw from the race before Sunday. This may be unlikely, but we have found widespread disappointment with Wade's performance on economic issues, and a pervasive feeling that he has "wasted" the opportunity granted him seven years ago to reform and reinvigorate the political and economic systems. Furthermore, problems in energy and cooking gas supply, stagnation in the agricultural sector, and traffic gridlock in Dakar have negated political gains he could have expected from programs to construct new schools, kindergartens, village lighting and roads in rural areas. While Wade won thanks to Dakar slum votes in 2000, some say slum dwellers this year are as disenchanted as everyone else with unresolved urban problems, and that they will abandon him.

PLAYING WITH NUMBERS

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14. (C) In an election with, by our count, four major, five middleweight and six minor candidates, the vote is expected to be dispersed widely. In calculating Wade's Wade's potential vote, they refer not to his eventual 2000 second-round majority, but to his scores in the single-round elections of 1988 (officially 26 percent, although this was probably rigged downward by the Socialist party government); 1993 (32 percent); and the first round in 2000 (31 percent). His base and that of the PDS, they conclude, has never exceeded one third of the electorate. He has presumably picked up a few percent thanks to his co-optation of some Socialists, but has also presumably lost some because of ex-Prime Minister Idrissa Seck's on-again, off-again defection from the PDS. Furthermore, there are questions whether the PDS, always Wade's personal instrument rather than a structured political party, can overcome recent internal strife and run an efficient campaign.

#### RESHAPING THE ELECTORAL PROCESS

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15. (C) Wade's Interior Ministry, especially in the last year and a half under long-time PDS stalwart Ousmane NGom, has applied post-2000 constitutional amendments, laws and presidential decrees to reshape the electoral process and create a new and by some accounts less effective election watchdog organization. Critics charge, and provide evidence, that NGom has invariably shaped the new system in Wade's favor. Moreover, they allege that NGom has manipulated first voter registration and then distribution of voter registration cards to favor pro-Wade areas and disadvantage the opposition. The opposition argues that by holding down the vote and by allegedly preparing to allow mostly pro-Wade partisans to vote, the Interior Ministry will effectively rig

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the election.

#### THE FIRE AND BLOOD GAMBIT

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16. (SBU) In just the last few days, the opposition has stepped up warnings to Wade not to manufacture a first-round victory. The usually soft-spoken and eminently reasonable international lawyer Aissata Tall Sall, in her role as Socialist leader Ousmane Tanor Dieng's campaign manager, has warned that a first round victory will amount to a coup d'etat and that the country will become "ungovernable." Ex-Prime Minister Seck has warned of "fraud," while another ex-Prime Minister and presidential candidate, Moustapha Niasse, warns of an "electoral hold-up." Press headlines charge that Wade is "making fraud official," and claim that Prime Minister Macky Sall's prediction that there will be no second round amounts to "the theorizing of theft." There are wild rumors that the Government is preparing to jam phone lines or the radio network, or that religious militias (Kara MBacke, Bethiou Thioune, Mamoune Niasse,s) will march to the presidency on Sunday to declare Wade's victory. Others in the opposition have warned that fixing the election would subject the country to "fire and blood," and while there has always been a significant element of bluff to these warnings, they seem increasingly to indicate real plans to take to the streets in case of blatant fraud.

#### COMMENT

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17. (C) In the absence of reliable public polls, no one knows how this election will turn out. Wade's ruling PDS has spent massively on his campaign and he enjoys the advantages of incumbency, such as domination of public radio and TV. There is, though, deep disappointment with Wade's leadership and widespread disgruntlement over social and economic problems. We do not believe that Wade in a fair and transparent election can significantly surpass his traditional score of a third of the vote, plus whatever limited support he may gain from Socialist defectors. All that plus the advantages his Interior Ministry has built for him into the new electoral

process may enable him to approach 50 percent of the vote. We do not believe, though, that he could credibly win in the first round.

¶18. (C) Indeed, the opposition has already made clear that they will not credit a Wade first-round victory, and that they will take to the streets if he is declared the winner. There is potential for unrest and even violence in the coming weeks, while in the longer term the opposition and much of civil society would react to a first round Wade victory by refusing to grant that he has the legitimacy to rule. END COMMENT.

¶19. (U) Visit Embassy Dakar,s classified website at <http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/af/dakar>. JACOBS